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# Book Marks

Furman University

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# BOOK MARKS

Featuring summaries of books written by Furman faculty and alumni, as well as reviews of books recommended by faculty and staff as "good reads."

## RECOMMENDED

Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead: A Novel* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004). The form of this novel is a series of letters composed by an aging Protestant minister with a terminal heart disease as a testament for his 7-year-old son. The disease is angina pectoris; he notes with some satisfaction that it has a theological sound, "like misericordia." In his small town on the Great Plains the pastor has kept up with his Greek and Hebrew, his Calvin and Feuerbach, and it shows in his deeply intelligent, sometimes achingly beautiful reflections on love and grace, sorrow and brokenness. He is blessed late in life by a marriage to a young woman appearing from out of nowhere, yet haunted by a wayward godson whose return to town prompts fierce soul-searching and brings, perhaps, a sliver of reconciliation. Robinson, who has authored a collection of essays on Calvinist theology, treats her readers to masterful prose and a feast of ideas.

— Shelly Matthews, *Religion*

Enrique Krauze (translator: Hank Heifetz), *Mexico: Biography of Power* (Harper Collins, 1997). I like to argue with Octavio Paz (1990 Nobel Laureate). It usually goes like this: Paz makes a splashy claim like this blurb to *Mexico: Biography of Power*: "By coming to know Mexico, North Americans can learn to understand an unacknowledged part of themselves." I wonder why Paz always thinks he knows more about my country than I do. Then I find myself thinking about the quote for a while . . . and deciding that Paz is right.

Krauze delivers a well documented, engaging narrative full of unforgettable details: Hidalgo's troops looking for tails on their slain Creole

enemies, Francisco Madero's reliance on spiritualism while planning the Revolution of 1910, or Santa Anna's tears upon realizing just how much land he ceded to the United States in the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Although at nearly 800 pages it is a challenge to read straight through, the book holds valuable insights both for Mexicans and for those interested in American policy toward our southern neighbor.

— Ron Friis, *Spanish*

Howard Gardner, *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds* (Harvard Business School, 2004). Paradigmatic thinking is often a hindrance to progress. The remedy is education (Latin *ex-ducere*), for it leads (ducere) the individual out (ex) of established mindsets prone to dogmatism. If we lead ourselves out of ourselves, we will meet others "out there" where we can contribute to a better togetherness.

In *Changing Minds* Gardner, a psychologist, discusses what might lead us "out there." Change can occur in six arenas, ranging from changes within one's own mind to large-scale changes of an entire nation. Gardner identifies seven levers that aid or obstruct mind change: reason, research, resonance, redescription, resources and rewards, real-world events, and resistances. Each of these factors works in distinctive ways. The book builds on decades of psychological research and is scientifically well grounded. Its implications apply to everyday life as well as one's workplace, educational systems, politics and religion.

— Akan Malici, *Political Science*

## FROM ALUMNI

Kenneth E. Hall '75, *Stonewall Jackson and Religious Faith in Military Command* (McFarland & Company, 2005). The author, professor of Spanish and chair of foreign languages at East Tennessee State University, examines "the long tradition of the religious warrior" by focusing on Civil War general Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson and other military leaders. The publisher states, "The relationship between war and religion is nothing new. For millennia, humankind has waged war over religion and derived religion from war. It is not surprising, then, that military leadership and religious conviction frequently coincide." Much of the book is based on "the perspective of those who lived with and served under Jackson, whose testimonies attest to his courage, initiative, tactical talent, religious faith and eccentric habits." Hall also examines Jackson as a "religious martyr, remembered today within an epic frame of sainthood and heroism."

Robert Whitlow '76, *Jimmy* (Westbow Press, 2005). Whitlow, known for his faith-based legal thrillers, has been called "the John Grisham of the Christian fiction market." His publisher describes this novel as being "in the tradition of *Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*." The title character is a "slow" teenager living in Piney Grove, Ga. But Jimmy has an eye for detail and an uncanny memory. Ultimately, his testimony in a trial helps free a man — and leads to "far-reaching consequences" for Jimmy and those he loves. The author, who was profiled in the Winter 2004 *Furman* magazine, is an attorney in Charlotte, N.C., and has won the prestigious Christy Award for Contemporary Fiction. To learn more, visit his Web site, [www.robertwhitlow.com](http://www.robertwhitlow.com).

Edward Hammett '78, *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age: Building Bridges Instead of Barriers* (Lake Hickory Resources, 2005). This is the author's fourth book for churches and church leaders. It reviews lessons he learned while serving for 13 years as a life coach of a group of unchurched people. It also offers tools for helping leaders and churches discover practical ways to attract, assimilate and disciple those who are spiritually thirsty but who may not be able to find their way into traditional churches. Hammett is a senior coach for Valwood Coaching and a senior consultant with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Percy Walters '49, *Scott's Ark* (Harbor House, 2005). Described by the publisher as "a thriller of biblical proportions," this faith-based novel revolves around NASA shuttle pilot Scott Walker and his old college friend, John Johnston, an undercover agent for the CIA. Scott, John and Scott's boss discover that they "are having similar frightening and prophetic dreams" that are calling them to save those they love — and perhaps humanity. The book "brings to life a modern-day Noah, chosen to receive the message of pending global annihilation, and guided by faith to take drastic steps into a vast unknown future." The author lives in Monroe, N.C., and is a semi-retired dentist. To learn more, write him at [percywalters@carolina.rr.com](mailto:percywalters@carolina.rr.com).

Robyn Hood Black '84, *Sir Mike* (Children's Press, Scholastic, 2005). Part of the Rookie Reader series, this is a rhymed tale of a young boy's adventure in his own back yard. Could that be a dragon moving in the bushes? David Murphy's lively illustrations invite young readers to play. To learn more, visit [www.robynhoodblack.com](http://www.robynhoodblack.com).